

THE RIVER FARTHEST OUT

One night I had a dream. I dreamed that the city in which I had lived and worked for many years had suddenly become a city in fairyland. A beautiful fairy dressed in white and gold came to me and said, "I am the spirit of this city. Command me and I will grant you whatever you wish."

"Show me the most wonderful thing that this city contains," I cried, "something which no eye has ever seen before."

She waved her wand and immediately I saw a river rise up out of the earth and flow up into the sky. It was the purest river I had ever seen...pure distilled water was never more clear...the reflection of earth and sky was in it as in a mirror...the sun, moon and stars all shone in it at the same time.

"I didn't know that river was there!" I exclaimed. "Why didn't some one ever tell me that river was there?"

"Because you have been content with what your eyes have shown you and with what people have told you. But know henceforth that the greatest things are the invisible things, the things which the eye does not see and the ear does not hear."

I gazed long at the river rising steadily, silently, powerfully as if it would never cease its flow.

Finally I said, "But whence comes this river? How can it flow on so endlessly? From what eternal spring does it rise?"

"Do you mean to say that you have never watched the raindrops falling in your city, and the hail and snow? Do you not know that if water comes down, it must also go up again from whence it comes?"

"But raindrops and snowflakes cannot make a river," I cried. "There aren't raindrops enough in the whole state to make a river as wide as that. There are only thirteen inches of rainfall in this city a year. But the water I see flowing past me can be measured by tons. Can inches be converted into tons?"

Said the fairy, "If you talk in numbers I, too, can talk in numbers. Spread your thirteen inches of rainfall over this entire city and it weighs seven million tons, equal to the combined weight of all the men, women, and children of America. How long would it take a lake of seven million tons to flow into the sky?"

"I don't know."

"It would take all year for such a river to flow into the sky. Look long at the river, and when you have looked your fill, I shall show you another wonder even greater than this."

Next she took me to a high hill, one of the seven hills upon which my fair city is built.

"See before you the homes in which happy people are dwelling," she began. "See the hospitals, the schools and colleges scattered out all before you. See the beautiful parks and playgrounds. See the hotels and factories. Would you see the power that built these?"

"Yes," I replied.

For a long time I waited. As I waited I tried to imagine what was the mystery that I was to see. Would it be an army of carpenters and masons? I waited for them, but they did not come. Would it be contractors and architects? They, too, did not appear. Would it be gold and silver, stocks and bonds? They, too, did not put in an appearance.

"You asked me to show you the wonders that cannot be seen by the eye of man," the fairy reminded me, "the great, invisible things. You are looking without; I am waiting for you to look within."

So I grew very still, very quiet, very humble. Then I looked again. Suddenly a great light shone above me and the sky seemed to open, and through the rift came a vast river of light. Never had I seen such dazzling light, and yet never light so restful to the eye. All the purity of the sunshine, all the beauty of the rainbow was wrapped in the folds of that light.

Then softly I said, "Is it from thence that comes all the power that is creating my city...and my world? From the skies?"

The fairy did not speak. She merely pointed to another river...a river also of light, that flowed not downwards but upwards.

Then she said, speaking very softly, "From the heart of men there is continually being drawn a constant living river...a river that the eye of man hath not seen, nor the ear heard...but far greater, far mightier than any river that ever sought its way to the sea. It is the great silent river from the souls of men that flows forever upwards, the river that Isaiah talked about when he said, 'But in the last days it shall come to pass that the mountains of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and people shall flow unto it.'"

Gradually the picture faded out of sight. Then the fairy said "I have answered your request. I have shown you wonderful things that eye hath not seen nor ear heard. What more would you ask?"

"How can I put myself in the flow of this stream of power?" I asked. "How can I surrender myself and be one with it?"

The fairy led me down the hill to a little lake. Above the lake the mists were forming, writhing, twisting until they took the form of a fairy maiden, soft and translucent and white.

"Ask her who she is," commanded my guide.

"I am the Spirit of the Lake," she replied, "I am the Spirit of all water. What would you command me?"

"Tell me the secret of your power," I said.

"My secret is that I rise easily and I fall easily. I do not rise to myself alone, neither do I fall to myself alone. That is the secret of my power. Wherever I go I bring happiness. As I rise I bring happiness to the sky. As I fall I bring happiness to the earth. All the power, all the magic of the machinery of the world is caused by me and my magic garment of steam. I am lifted to a higher altitude level by the warmth of the sun, and fall from the mountain top down upon the mill wheels beneath. I am lifted to a higher temperature level by the warmth of coal and oil, and fall from the higher temperature level of the boiler to the lower temperature level of the generator. But wherever I move I bring power. And wherever my power is used with love, I bring happiness."

"But how do you rise and how do you fall?" I asked.

"I rise by relaxing my grip on things. I let go of the clay and earth and mud particles, on everything that is not mine to keep and hold. I relax my grip on everything that is unlike myself, on all that does not belong to my own nature. Thus by the mere act of letting go I find my own true essential self, and my real self is always light and airy and free. Without any volition of its own it gravitates upward to the exact place and level that belongs to it. It would be more amazing, when one has released himself from that which is not himself, if he did not gravitate upward to the place that belongs to him, than it would be for a stone dropped from the hand not to fall upon the earth beneath."

"But you are only water," I exclaimed. "Your secret cannot be my secret. I want the secret of my life. How can I put myself in the stream of power and rise and fall in the service of God and the service of man?"

The Spirit of the Lake whirled and eddied until her face appeared almost as clear as a human face. Then with a smile she fixed me with her eyes and said, "And are you not five parts water for every part clay?" and with a silvery laugh she whirled into the air and vanished.

As I turned to my guide, a lithe young man clad in light swimming costume dashed down to the shore, up the spring board, and with one pretty vaulting leap flew through the air with the airy lightness of a bird. He cut the water like a fish. A few moments later he scrambled out of the water and sat down beside me.

"Speak to him," commanded my guide. "Ask him the secret of his power."

"Would you mind telling me how you made that beautiful dive?"

"When I step out of my street costume and into my swimming suit," he said, "I let go of all my old body tensions, my nerve inhibitions, and my artificially created reflexes. All day long by wrong standing postures I have been building tensions into my nerves and muscles, tensions that are not my natural own. All day by wrong walking, wrong sitting, wrong resting, they have been getting their hold on my nature. When I let go of the things that are not mine to keep, when I drop all that is unlike myself, all that does not belong inherently to my own nature, I find my own essential self, light and airy and free. Oh!" and he stretched his arms as high as he could reach and turned around slowly three times, gazing upward toward the sky, "Oh, at such times when I am truly myself I feel as though I could fly without wings!"

Suddenly he turned to me.

"But greater than the joy of leaping up is the joy of falling down. To fall with all of yourself, to let all of yourself go without hesitation, without fear, straight into the great silver lake of God! To let the freedom of your joy pull you up and the freedom of gravity pull you down...that is heaven!"

Then I thought to myself, "I begin to see the secret of power. It is to fall first up, then down. Yes, everything we do is but a falling process, a falling first up and then down. Walking is a falling process, running is a falling process. Leaping, bounding, dancing, gymnastic feats are merely different forms and expressions of the falling process. He who is the most relaxed and who gives himself most abundantly and joyously and harmoniously to falling in harmony with the law of gravity is the one who excels at these things. Every movement of every relaxed body, when that movement is in perfect accordance with the law of gravity, is a perfect and beautiful movement."

"First it was Water," said the fairy at my shoulder, "then it was Body. Is this all the expression of power that you would see?"

"Show me Mind," I commanded.

An old man appeared, coming down to the lake. He seemed to be deep in thought. Seating himself near us with his back against a stone in a position of beautiful relaxation, he stared intently at the water. Never did I see a man so unself-conscious, so natural, so free.

"This is the one who has given the world the incandescent lamp and the talking machine, and a thousand other inventions that have made the modern world. Ask him how you can put yourself in the living stream of his power."

"How did you find that which you have found?" I asked. "Give me the secret of your power."

"I left school when I was a boy," he replied, "because my mother wanted to save me from interruptions and inhibitions of well-meaning teachers. I escaped the artificial striving after grades, the fear of examinations, the selfish rivalries of school rooms. I never showed off before my classmates. I let go and released my grip on all the empty honors, all the external artificial processes of education, the insincerities and the hypocrisies and the unnaturalnesses that were not mine.

Thus I found myself, and that self was light, unhampered and free. Then I let myself gravitate to that which my curiosity and intellectual hunger naturally drew me, where my real warm interests lay. I never did a day's work in my life. It was all play, because I always put my enthusiasm into it. Friend, I have always been a boy."

As I listened, I knew that gravity in the mental realm is the drawing power of the God-given urge, the deep-seated inner enthusiasms, the leadings of the healthy, sincere, honest mind that, left to itself, always seeks for the finest and best that has been thought and done. The mind which is completely relaxed from self-consciousness, from fears, from inhibitions, will naturally and wholeheartedly seek that which it really desires. It is the characteristic of all geniuses that they seek without apology or excuse that which they truly and honestly want, and so great is the peace and happiness that they derive from this seeking that nothing can make them desist until they reach it. "Genius is," as Robert Louis Stevenson said, "the expression of an artist's true joy in his work."

"First it was Water," said the fairy at my shoulder, "then it was Body, then it was Mind. Is that all?"

My voice came faint and faltering as I whispered, "Show me Spirit."

Even as I spoke, a beautiful One with white mantle all of one piece and woven from above came down to the Lake and seated Himself in the end of a boat. The two men and the fairy and I sat on the shore.

"Is there anything you would have me tell you?" He asked of us on the shore.

"Tell me your source of power," I cried, "and tell me how to place myself in the center of that stream of power."

In a voice of soft accent, and yet which could be clearly heard from where He was, He said:

"Blessed are those who feel poor in spirit. Lightened of the dross of earth, the Realm of Heaven is theirs.

"Blessed are those that mourn. Lightened of the weight of attachment, they will rise to the high consolations.

"Blessed are the meek. Lightened of the grip of pride, they shall be lifted to where they may command the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after the righteousness that is on high. They shall the sooner be lifted to the place where every desire of the spirit is fulfilled.

"Blessed are the merciful. They shall be lifted to where they may derive the fruits of mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart. They shall be lifted to where they shall see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers. They shall be lifted to where they shall be sons of God.